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HOW CAN INSTRUCTION IN SUCH SUBJECTS AS  
CURRENT EVENTS AND CIVICS IN SECONDARY  
SCHOOLS BE MADE TRIBUTARY TO THE STUDY  
OF ECONOMICS AND GOVERNMENT IN COLLEGE?

I THINK it a great honor to be invited to address the New England Association of Schools and Colleges on the subject stated in the program of your proceedings, and not the less in view of the generous praises which yesterday were given to the association of those of the Middle States and Maryland. We of those states are under great obligations to the educators of New England, and that for many other reasons than because you have given us the example of bringing the schools and colleges into closer co-operation. One such, that has been neither recorded nor commemorated, was the advent of a large number of New England teachers into the counties of eastern Pennsylvania just half a century ago, and to this day their influence in the improvement of methods and the awakening of interest in the schools continues to be felt. It is always a day to be marked with a white stone when we have Dr. Charles W. Eliot among us.

You no doubt have heard the story of the Boston merchant who borrowed the plays of Shakespeare from a neighbor and, when he brought them back, remarked: "Those are very superior plays. I do not think there are five men in Boston who could have written those plays!" I am going to make a bolder statement, and say that there are not five men in Boston, or any other city of this country, who are capable of reading a newspaper. This "folio of one sheet, which not even the critics criticise," as Cowper calls it, is what everybody thinks himself equal to understanding without study or help. Although it unfolds before us every day the great picture of human life, with its unsolved puzzles and its endless surprises, it is to most of us a mere gathering of fragments, without unity, and therefore without any connected meaning. To master its contents would require the deepest philosophy, the widest science, the largest learning. I can imagine Mother Nature taking it from the hand of the average man, and saying: "That, my son, is much too miscellaneous an affair

for you. I would advise you first to pursue a course of systematic study before you attempt it. The *Brittanica*, with the recent 'Supplement,' would serve your turn. I would recommend Ersch and Grüber, if I did not fear that you would be dead before the last hundred volumes of the third part appeared. You must know a great deal more about life before you attempt a daily newspaper."

The teaching of current events in our schools and our social clubs I take to be a confession that the newspaper is not the simple thing it had been supposed, and that we need to look for the unity of law and principle which underlies its varied contents, and to bring order for ourselves out of its seeming chaos. We must look beneath its facts for their philosophy, and behind them for their historic antecedents, if we are to get at their true meaning. And while the editor labors by his comments to enlighten us on these points, the rise of this new study proves that he has not done so satisfactorily.

In the search for the unity which binds together the great web of life the newspaper discloses, there are several lines of approach. One man will look for the spiritual bearings of what he reads; another, for the ethical. Today we are concerned about two humbler lines of study—the political and the economical. That our students should get clear ideas about what the newspaper shows us of these things is true not only with regard to the future studies of those who go to college and take up political and economic studies. Most of them will never enter college, and it is our duty and our privilege to help to make them patriotic and intelligent citizens by our lessons. And whether they go to college or not, of this we are sure: they all will be readers of the newspaper, and multitudes of them of little or nothing else. It is therefore of the utmost importance that we associate thoughtful and intelligent habits with the only approach to intellectual employment which these will enjoy.

The reading of newspapers without any perception of the underlying unities may be a positive harm. Coleridge quotes from an Arab philosopher a statement of the practices by which the memory may be ruined, and one of them is reading the inscriptions on the tombstones of a graveyard, which have no connection with each other. To many the paragraphs of a newspaper are as disconnected as those inscriptions, and the memory gives way under the practice. We

wonder at the human memory which carried the Vedas, the Talmud, Job, and Homer across the centuries for us. Those men read no newspapers.

First of all as to the teaching of civics in the schools and its bearing on the study of political science. That our boys should know what the state is, and what are the methods of its government, is admitted to be of great importance. The way to begin that teaching is to start from what the boy actually sees and knows, that the whole matter may be real to him. Now, the nearest and most concrete representative of government is the policeman, whom we may take to represent civic government, while the militia man stands for that of the state, and the postman for that of the nation. The average boy never sees a president; rarely a governor; and if he should see the mayor, it is most likely that he would not know him. But the policeman every boy sees and recognizes.

It was through the policeman that I first got my lesson as to the nature of American government. I came to this country a school-boy, and had a young cousin who was born in America. He began by telling me that one American like him could thresh a dozen Britishers like me. His next exploit was to go up to a policeman and chaff him! In the country where I was born we boys shunned a policeman almost as we would a mad dog. If we saw one coming, we got around the corner. People are arrested in that country for whistling a tune offensive to the police. I looked to see my little cousin "run in" for the offense, but to my astonishment the policeman only chaffed him back. From that day I began to understand that the great dualism which sunders government and people in even the freest countries of the Old World has no existence in the New, and that the government is just the people in their official capacity. That helped me to understand the passionate attachment of the people to their government and whatever represents it, as, for instance, the national flag which I saw flaunted everywhere on the first Fourth of July. In my native country a man would as soon have thought of having a pulpit in his house as of having a flag. I had seen the flag of that country but twice in my boyhood, and both times at the head of a recruiting squad, beating up soldiers.

Begin at home, then, in teaching the boy what his country and

its political order are to him. Take the current facts with which he is familiar, such as a great trial which excites popular interest. Lead him forward from the familiar to the more remote facts and the more abstruse principles. Of course, the teacher must have in his mind the science of the subject to the extent which enables him to interpret the facts rightly. Dr. Elisha Mulford's great book, *The Nation: The Foundations of Civil Order and Political Life in the United States*, is an excellent book for the teacher, but cannot be quoted to the class, so that it must be absorbed into the mind. With the theory of the subject well in hand, it is easy to put questions which will bring into clear light the functions of the state as "the institute of rights," and to show the proper limits of its activity—that it is not to bake bread for us, even though it might do that better than our bakers do; that it punishes crimes and not sins; that it seeks to adjust penalty to offense in point of gravity; and that it guards with especial care the rights of accused persons. By such discussion the pupil can be brought to grasp the idea of the state as the great partnership in all excellencies and in all virtues, the union of the past and coming generations with the present, which makes us the fellow-citizens of George Washington as truly as of Theodore Roosevelt.

One of the preliminary steps is to have every boy learn the constitution of the United States by heart. I know there is a prejudice against memorizing in our time, but I think it a mistake. We are missing the opportunity to store the memory, in its most retentive stage, with things worth treasuring there, such as good poetry. And the constitution is worthy of that place. Every young Roman got the Laws of the Twelve Tables by heart, as the Scotch boy gets the Shorter Catechism. That is why those tables have been lost, as why write down what everybody knew? Our national constitution holds much the same place with us. It is one of the finest pieces of prose ever written, and it embodies the grandest step forward in political organization that has been taken by the human race since the fall of the Roman Empire.

Instruction in the elements of economic science, from the basis furnished by the study of current events, is even easier than is that in political science. The problems of economics are in the air in a way which is not true of the others. All our national disputes since the

reconstruction of the South have had an economic character. They grow inevitably out of the great conquest of a continent to human use, which has been our employment for two centuries. So we have money questions, labor questions, land questions, taxation questions, corporation questions, and the question of the value of protection to home industry. Even imperialism is but a branch of the problem of foreign trade. And this is certain to be the character of our national problems for a long time to come. Political economy is a series of footnotes to the newspaper, and one of the most direct means of unifying great masses of facts it furnishes us.

The old political economy had no use for the element supplied by the study of current events. As Senior told de Tocqueville, it was not hungry for facts. An eminent modern representative of it declared that he never had learned anything from history, and I believe he was right. But the new political economy seeks to be historical. It recognizes stages in the economic development of mankind, and that there may be a relative rightness in methods adopted in an early stage which does not exist in a later. It tries to account for those primitive methods, without merely condemning them as unscientific. The old political economy looked at life narrowly. It based its deductions of economic laws upon a few assumptions as to the nature of man, and those such as concerned the lower and less noble side of human nature. It told us that the desire to get and to get on, and the desire to avoid exertion, are the only motives we can depend upon, as everything else is exceptional and uncertain. Men are naturally greedy and naturally lazy, was its summing up of economic postulates. The new political economy is sympathetic, and generous in its estimates of our humanity. It is not even afraid of "sentiment"—once the most terrible accusation that could be brought against an economist. Since W. T. Thornton wrote his book on *Capital*, and John Stuart Mill reviewed it in the *Fortnightly*, it has cherished hopes for the future of mankind, believing that it is possible for the general condition of the laboring classes to improve, and refusing to measure that possibility by any "iron law of wages."

It advances with every decade in the more humane direction. It is less than ten years, for instance, since the significance of the child in human development came to recognition. That the majority

of the human race is under five years old, and that the human child is the most helpless of all living things, and the most dependent on its parents for every kind of care and support, must have seemed to the older economists a heavy burden on the energies of the race and a great obstacle to progress. Just the contrary is the fact. It is the love of their offspring that has been the great stimulus to the advance of mankind. It was for the child's sake that the field was inclosed and tilled, the house built, and finer clothing and better food procured. It was and is for the child's sake that the father toils to make home more comfortable, as well as the mother watches to anticipate its every need. This little hand has held the marshal's baton, leading forward the great advance of mankind from savagery to barbarism, and from barbarism to civilization. Those branches of the race which have loved their children most warmly, and labored for them most industriously, have risen the highest in the scale of human well-being; while those which cared the least for them—*e. g.*, the Australians—have remained at the foot of the ladder. The economic motive is not found in selfish desire of personal comfort, but in that "love for other than self" which is the first step in moral development.

Young people are not indifferent to the economic side of life and the problems it offers us. From an experience of a good many years in teaching both sexes, I can say so with assurance. I also may say that I have taken hold of the subject from either end, theory and the observation of facts, and found them equally suitable. Dr. Drown, the accomplished president of Lehigh University, tells of two very able chemists who were asked at which end of that subject a student should begin. The first said that no one should enter a laboratory until he had mastered the principles of the science through lectures and text-books. The second said that no one should hear a lecture until he had had a fair amount of laboratory practice. They both, Dr. Drown says, taught chemistry excellently. So it matters little whether the student begins economics in the laboratory of fact or in the mastery of theory. But here, as in political science, the teacher should have a good knowledge of the science before he undertakes to guide them in either.

The first thing he is sure to encounter is class prejudice, and this has been the bane of political economy with older people than they.

It is alleged, indeed, by the socialists that political economy is nothing but a defense of the social policy of the wealthy and the middle classes, and that the subject will never be handled rightly until the working classes become economists. Thus far Henry George is the only notable writer they have given us.

Prejudices from the one side meet us in the hostile attitude toward labor organizations, and the claim that the employer is right in ignoring them in dealing with his men. Mr. Thornton will show you what a great work the organizations have done to lift up the condition of their class. I meet them in my school more commonly from the other side, as in the statement that "labor produces everything, and has a right to the whole product," or "the rich accumulate wealth at the expense of the laborer, and only for their selfish gratifications." It is not hard to show that labor without the services of capital can produce nothing—cannot even dig clams or gather blackberries; also that the power to accumulate is as distinct a gift, and in its way as useful, as the power to write plays, or to construct machinery on new lines: and that it is as absurd to demand equality of condition as it would be to insist on equality of mental capacity. The rich man is not our master, but our servant. He cannot spend on personal pleasures more than a small fraction of a great fortune, and the rest he must turn into the channels of industry, with the result that we enjoy a thousand comforts which would have been impossible but for his gift of accumulation. It is a gift to be neither despised nor adored by us. It is no mark of great capacity or admirable character. As Dean Swift says: "Providence shows what it thinks of money by the people it gives it to."

Another side of the interest of young people in such questions is that which comes to them from their homes. The schoolboy's father is a voter, has taken his side on these questions, and commands the boy's adherence to that side of the question. We have a saying in Philadelphia that "men inherit their politics and marry their religion, while women inherit their religion and marry their politics." My own first achievement in that field was a bloody nose, earned by standing up for Sharman Crawford and Tenant Right, when I was about six years old. Right here comes the opening for one of the most important lessons we can enforce upon our boys, viz., that a

true man and a patriotic citizen belongs not to any party, but to his country and to the truth, however he may act with any party for the time being, as believing that it best represents his country's interests at that time.

Students trained in this elementary study of economics will be the best human material that any teacher of political economy can want for his classes. They will have caught the economic habit of observation, and learned to see things from that angle. And they will expect from their professors of the subject that economic science shall be kept in touch with the busy life of the world, that it shall be in sympathy with the best in our humanity, and that it shall be broad enough to embrace all human interests of the material class.

If we are to produce great economists, they must be "caught young," as are men who rise to great eminence in other fields. The great musicians, for instance, did not wait for their teens to undertake the work of composition. Mozart played at four and composed at six. Nor is economic science without a parallel. At the close of the War for Independence there came to Philadelphia an Irish exile who was greatly interested in economic questions, and wrote largely about them. He had a son born to him, and as the two walked our streets, the boy holding his father's hand, Matthew Carey pointed out to his son Henry the illustrations of political economy to be seen on every side. That son, as he told me, was steeped in the subject from his early boyhood. He lived to speak on the subject to the people of Europe in eight of their languages through his works, besides a translation into Japanese. I regard him as the greatest and most original of economists, and I hope we shall have many trained like him from their boyhood to deal with the weighty and pressing problems of our economic life.

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#### DISCUSSION.

PROFESSOR LAWRENCE B. EVANS, of Tufts College: Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen: I have listened to this address with fear and trembling, for, as Dr. Thompson has proceeded from one part to another of his very admirable survey, it seemed to me that he was on the point of

saying everything I had planned to say. He has, however, left one point untouched, which I will dwell upon for a few moments.

In the first part of his address Dr. Thompson very properly called attention to the fact that only a fraction of the students in the secondary schools, go to college. Courses of instruction in civics and in all subjects must therefore be laid out with the fact in mind that they are more than merely college-preparatory courses—that for the most of the students who receive instruction in these subjects this is all the instruction that they will ever receive. Their formal education will end when they leave the preparatory schools. The question, however, as it is worded upon our program, emphasizes another point of view: “How Can Instruction in Such Subjects as Current Events and Civics in Secondary Schools be Made Tributary to the Study of Economics and Government in Colleges?” It is from the standpoint of the college that I shall make my few remarks this morning.

In the beginning I wish to describe a little experiment which I have been in the habit of making with my beginning class in history. In Tufts College the beginning class is composed almost exclusively of sophomores, usually about fifty in number, and each year, early in the year, I have been in the habit of setting a little paper of about ten questions relating to current affairs. I have asked them such questions, for instance, as to give the names of three members of the President's cabinet; to tell who is the governor of Massachusetts; who represents Massachusetts in the United States Senate; who is president of Harvard University; and questions of similar import. The answers would be amusing if they were not so pathetic. Out of a class of fifty last year only one could answer all of these ten questions. Those that I have given you are fairly representative of all of them. Now, it seems to me that this little experiment—and I will not weary you with further details of it—shows one thing, and that is that the average college student is out of touch with his surroundings. Dr. Thompson has said that the reading of a newspaper is an art, that the newspaper should be made to show unity; and I quite agree with him. It seems to me, however, that the study of current events through the newspaper should be made to do one other thing; that is, it should be made to show the student that he himself has a personal connection with what is going on about him. If he sees in the newspaper that the senator from South Carolina says there should be a lynching every week, he should understand what that means to him. If he sees in a newspaper that there is a strike in New York, he should understand, even though he does not live in New York, that that is a phenomenon of society with which he has some personal connection. Now, it seems to me that the average college student does

not have that. He does not have a realizing sense—what the Methodists in their theology called a conviction—he does not have a realizing sense, a conviction, of any personal connection with the political and social organization in which he lives. Dr. Thompson has used one very happy phrase—more than one, but one particularly—“government means the people themselves in their official capacity.” Now, if a boy could be made to realize that he is one of the people—that government is not something which concerns everybody except himself, it seems to me that the most valuable single task to which the secondary schools could set themselves would be accomplished. John Fiske calls attention in one of his works to the fact that the men who grew up in localities where the town-meeting was the principal organ of government never had any delusions as to what constituted government. They themselves went to the town-meeting; they themselves determined what public measures should be adopted; if they voted for the building of a new bridge, they taxed themselves for the payment of the necessary expense. Unhappily, social conditions are now such that the town-meeting cannot be applied on so large a scale as it formerly was. The same object, however, must be attained in some other way, through some other means, and this, it seems to me, it is for the teachers in the secondary schools to ascertain. Through some means the students of civics and of current events in our secondary schools must be made to realize that they themselves have a direct personal connection with the society in which they live.

Now, as to any details of instruction which might be given them which would fit them for the further pursuance of similar subjects in the colleges it seems to me that, at present at any rate, we can hardly assume that there is sufficient agreement among schools as to what the course in civics should be for us to have any common standard. I happen to belong to a committee of another body which is dealing with this subject, and although we are only at the beginning of our work, one thing I think we have ascertained is that there is the greatest variety among the schools as to what the course in civics should be. There is no common standard, as there is in the teaching of so many other subjects. For myself, as to college teacher of government, I do not care particularly whether the students are familiar with the details of government, whether they have any particular technical knowledge as to the forms of government. I should be quite satisfied if they could only come to me with this one fact in mind, that when they begin the study of government they are beginning the study of something which directly concerns themselves. It seems to me that everything else might be quite well subordinated to that one thing. It would entirely change the point of view of the student.

PRESIDENT CHASE: I should be very glad, and I believe all present would, if Dr. Thompson would indicate to us somewhat in detail his method—whether he gives formal instruction, how he gets his class together, and what his method of procedure is.

DR. THOMPSON: In the high school I have a course in political economy for half a year. I have a little text-book, holding less than one hundred pages. The first twenty minutes are taken up with answering written questions on the part of boys who are called to do so; the next twenty minutes, with answering the boys, questions put to me. Every boy is required to ask questions. Any boy who cannot say that he has asked questions during the year is threatened with a leather medal at commencement, and I believe none was ever conferred. Then the last twenty minutes are spent in going over the whole subject again. They are directed to write questions out with reference to what is going on. Political economy is the subject of the lesson, but the questions are newspaper questions; they are questions of what is happening in every part of the country, and they bear on the subject of that lesson or on any previous subject, not on any future subject. In that way the express matters which are going on in the city are constantly brought before the class, and they are answered briefly and to their satisfaction. If they do not understand the answer, they say so, and get hold of it. In the girls' school, in which I have been teaching for a longer time, the work is in the shape of lectures once a fortnight upon the events of the previous fortnight, followed by questions, both bringing out the economic side of things as well as the political and the moral, and no difficulty whatever is found in arousing the interest of the girls. Some of them, indeed, are especially interested, because their parents are in touch with the subject. One young lady is the daughter of a leading railroad man in the Northwest, and on one occasion, at a dinner party given to railroad men in the house, when they were all talking railroad, she astonished them by interposing several objections, wanting to know whether railroads did this and whether railroads did that. They were very much astonished at a young lady asking such questions. When they were gone, her father said: "Margaret, where did you get all that?" "Why," she said, "don't you suppose I read the papers as well as others do?" "No, you did not get that out of the papers." I was very glad that she was there as a voice crying in the wilderness in the company of railroad men, telling them some of their iniquities. On these questions, especially when you show them that there is a moral bearing on politics and economics, you rouse the interest of young people almost invariably. There are some that are asleep all the time—I do not mean physically, but mentally—you cannot

wake them up; but they are exceptions. The American boy or girl that is not interested in politics and economics I think is always an exception. If you show them what it means, they are alive. Now, my method is not in accordance with the question which is put here, and therefore I did not bring out anything of the details of the method I am pursuing, but simply indicated what it seemed to me could be done in schools to fit the students to take up these questions with a realizing sense that they are facts, and not mere words, that the teacher of politics or the teacher of political economy has been talking about.

MR. HAROLD M. CHILDS, of the Swampscott High School: Would you be willing to tell us what text-book you referred to a minute ago?

DR. THOMPSON: It is a little book on political economy of my own: published by Ginn & Co.—*Political Economy for High Schools and Academies*.

MISS MARY ELLA WHIPPLE, of the English High School, Worcester: May I ask Dr. Thompson what he would suggest if he had boys and girls together?

DR. THOMPSON: I do not see that it makes a bit of difference. There is not anything in either of these two courses that would not be exactly the same if I had a class of the different sexes. They are just the same in their lines of interest, just the same in the kind of questions that are asked. The kind of questions I get from the rich man's daughters and the poor man's sons in the high school are identical, precisely the same problems; only the rich man's daughters are very often interested in some particular detail as to how a situation stands. I remember being questioned every day about how that Northern Securities decision was coming on when it was pending. They were intensely interested to know what was coming out of that. And another thing that they are interested in is the financial condition of the United States, the meaning of the report of the treasury, and so on; what it means that there is so much money on hand; what it is there for; why it should be there. All these things are coming up all the time. I wish I had the two together. I believe in coeducation and nothing else. I am very glad that Massachusetts has abolished the separation in her public schools. The superintendent of schools in our state and the superintendent in our city are both of the same mind, and would be glad to see the separation abolished in Pennsylvania and Philadelphia.